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**Public Health Committee  
Public Hearing, March 21, 2012  
Testimony in Support of SB425, An Act Concerning a Basic Health Program**

Good afternoon, Senator Gerratana, Representative Ritter, Senator Welch, Representative Perillo and distinguished members of the Public Health Committee,

My name is Susan Raimondo and I am the Senior Director of Advocacy and Programs for the National Multiple Sclerosis Society, Connecticut Chapter. The National MS Society has offices in Hartford and Norwalk. We serve over 6,000 individuals living with multiple sclerosis and their families in Connecticut.

**The National MS Society urges the Public Health Committee and the General Assembly to pass SB 425, An Act Concerning a Basic Health Program.**

Multiple sclerosis is one of the most disabling illnesses that impacts families that are between the ages of 20 – 50. Individuals with multiple sclerosis experience a variety of complex medical symptoms and problems. MS is a chronic disease that attacks the central nervous system, including the brain, spinal cord, and optic nerves. Symptoms may be mild or severe including paralysis and loss of vision. The progress, severity, and specific symptoms of MS are unpredictable and vary from one person to another.

Although there is still no cure for MS, effective strategies are available to modify the disease course, treat exacerbations (also called attacks, relapses, or flare-ups), manage symptoms and improve function. In combination, these treatments enhance the quality of life for people living with MS. People living with MS need access to primary and specialty care, chronic disease management, rehabilitative services and devices, mental health and prescription drugs. All of these services are critical and need to be included within any type of health coverage.

SB 425, An Act Concerning a Basic Health Program provides a mechanism for people who are “just making it” to get health care coverage. This legislation is important for the entire state of Connecticut, however it is critical for our members who are often single, unable to find work, waiting on Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or who are in the 2 year waiting period for Medicare to begin once accepted for SSDI.

The financial impact of MS is exorbitant; the average annual costs for someone with MS in the U.S., including both direct and indirect costs (i.e. lost wages), is approximately \$69,000. Of this, approximately \$39,000 consists of health care costs. Total costs for all people with MS in the U.S. are approximately \$28 billion annually.

The Affordable Care Act provides for the Health Insurance Exchange; however in reality, an option like the Basic Health Plan must be developed to give those living just above the federal poverty level a way to access health care coverage.

Please pass SB 425, An Act Concerning the Basic Health Program and model the BHP after Medicaid in our state.

Thank you.